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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS¹

BY BEEKMAN COX LITTLE²

Through long established custom this Association has in a way made its president's address resemble a valedictory, inasmuch as he relinquishes his office very soon after its delivery.

There is something soothing to the present speaker to know that according to our constitution his term of office *does* expire definitely at the close of this convention, and is not dependent on the quality of his speech; for should this latter condition prevail, he fears his retirement would be forced by popular vote in about fifteen minutes.

It speaks indeed well for the patience and endurance of our members that for forty years—with but one exception—this Association has survived the annual infliction of a formal President's Address. Fortunately however the reputation of the Association does not rest entirely upon this record in its long history. There are many other happenings to which we can point with more pride and with happier recollections.

My active connection with the Association does not go back to its beginnings, nor does my memory, but its growth is a matter of record, and graphically its progress—activity and influence for good—would be represented by a line constantly curving upwards.

There should be no fear of its becoming too large or unwieldy if we remember—as Mr. Davis explained to us last year—that our real scope is to act, in a very broad sense as a great central organization embracing all the water works plants in the county, gathering in from them vast funds of information which it may in turn index, tabulate and re-issue as an invaluable aid and guide to the various Sections and individual communities as the need for it appears.

The planning, constructing and maintaining of our water works now present so many different problems that our position as set forth by our claims, is weak unless we have among us men fitted

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by experience and by education to help with any difficulty which arises.

Our American Water Works Association would fail—and would deserve to fail, for it would belie its name and aim—if it did not welcome and do all in its power to attract and hold in its membership all of the water works superintendents and managers—even to those of the very smallest plants. On the other hand it must take no step which might to the slightest degree tend to repel or exclude the technical man in the engineering or other professions who may be active and interested in any phase of water supply.

It would be idle to speculate upon, and I believe impossible to ascertain, which of those two classes, the civil engineer or the superintendent, is most important to the life of this organization and I think a vote of no by a large majority would result on a resolution favoring either.

Each of us must know and should base his actions always in this Association on the predication that most decidedly we need all kinds of water works men, and that all kinds need us.

With men of so many minds, we may have differences of opinions, but concerning the management of the affairs of our Association I find these differences merely cover methods or plans of reaching the same conclusion.

The welfare of the Association is the one aim striven for and there can be no fundamental danger to it in our arguments and discussions when all have honestly its best interests at heart. Ever since my application for membership was favorably acted upon—some eighteen years ago—my admiration for the Association has kept increasing, but during the past year when my official duties caused greater opportunities for knowing much better its personnel and its workings, my enthusiasm and pride in it have surpassed the accumulation of all the other years put together.

Your officers and trustees seem to have a real affection for the Association and give to it uncomplainingly many hours of valued service. You may rest assured that their decisions are reached only after careful deliberation and with not the slightest ulterior motive. They accept in good faith the trust which you have put upon them and desire only to render a proper account of their stewardship. This good character thus given by me to your officers with whom I have come in contact, naturally reflects on all of the members by whom they were chosen, and from whose ranks they have come.

It seems to me that as a class, there is none other which represents so much of usefulness, hard work, earnestness of purpose, common sense and knowledge of—and devotion to—his calling, as does the water works man; and by the water works man I mean the composite figure which makes up our Association—from the superintendent of the village system to the chief engineer or general manager of our large metropolitan districts; from the weather beaten untiring foreman who seems to care for his meters, mains and hydrants as if they were his own, to the expert on filtration or purification methods who spends most of his waking hours in keeping the dangerous bacillus in its proper place and condition. Mayhap, the individual in each of these extremes does emphasize the importance of his work and minimize the difficulties which the other encounters, but they all seem to cooperate and *do* understand that *together* they are working for just one splendid result, that is to make our public water supplies as reliable, as pure and as efficient as is humanly possible.

We of course know the burden of responsibility which rests upon us, but our employers—the Public—long accustomed to a most satisfactory service, which they have always obtained from this one of the great public utilities—seem to realize neither the scope of our success nor the extent of the ensuing calamity should we fail.

Years ago, and by that I mean—back before this American Water Works Association was formed—it might have been possible for any business man of good average ability to take over the management of a water works system and get away with it, according to the light of those days, but today, that manager would carry on but a short time unless he had at his command, the advice and help of such men, for example, as are gathered at this convention.

The superintendent of water works in these days has to deal not alone with the general problems connected with the construction and operation of his plant, but also with those of sanitation, chemistry, forestry, bacteriology, electricity and finance—just to mention a few. He must acquaint himself with the laws pertaining to public utilities and be conversant with state and national health regulations which may have a bearing on the operation of his plant. He should be a diplomat, capable of pleading his cause with skill and force. It goes without saying that by virtue of his office he generally has to be a politician, but greatly to his credit be it said that he almost invariably is that type of politician much to be emulated, i.e., one who attracts adherents to his party by the way he attends to

the public business which has been intrusted to him. The Public finds him generally as dependable as the commodity he serves. The average citizen, always able to obtain his needed supply of water with the greatest ease and at a wonderfully low cost compared with other necessities of life, apparently does not attribute to the man back of the pumps or reservoirs, any possessions beyond a wrench and suit of overalls. This attitude is due to the fact that Mr. Taxpayer hardly ever is told anything different.

Through a fear of praising and advertising our own achievements we are too prone to let him go on in the old belief that water is or at least ought to be as free as air and as easy to obtain.

There is scheduled for this Convention, a paper on Water Works Publicity, and without knowing the author's argument, or desiring to steal his thunder, I would earnestly urge this Association to seriously consider the advisability of a dignified campaign of advertising.

The water works man now fights his battles alone, with little encouragement and wins them with no applause.

The successful operation of his plant is seemingly taken for granted and only in the case of a rare failure or accident is he brought into the limelight, and then generally to be blamed.

There are, though but few know it, many great men in the water works profession. Some of them are facing me now and the names of many others appear on the roster of our organization. They are great because they are successfully conducting and directing the most important of our public utilities and the mark of their greatness lies in the fact that they are performing their work faithfully, efficiently, and quietly, content in the feeling that their work is well done, seeking no praise and fearing no criticism.

At some future time the real value, to the country, of the water works man, is bound to be recognized and then he will become famous as well as great. We should do all that we can to hasten this time, not through selfish motives, but because the fame of the individual necessarily attracts attention to the work in which he is engaged.

With a better knowledge of our water supplies and their needs instilled into the citizens of our communities, a greater enthusiasm will be aroused. It will then become easier to obtain backing in the many projects for extensions and improvements which we know should go on and which so often are too long delayed. A well

defined policy of educating and interesting the Public would I believe easily bring about this much desired end. We shall be told at a later session of this Convention how the scheme has worked splendidly in individual cases, and it should be successful on a much wider scale if entered into and carried on by us as an Association project.

There are many marvellous steps and paths which a drop of water takes from the distant lake, reservoir or deep well, before it emerges from the faucet in the home or factory. They may all seem prosaic enough to us, but these wonderfully simple things might appear to others in the telling, simply wonderful and in all truth mighty interesting. Through this process, is it too much of a vision to picture some of our great public spirited men becoming as earnest supporters of our water systems as they are of various other great community interests?

These men are giving vast sums of money each year to our universities for equipment and expert service. They are endowing hospitals and establishing free clinics and immense institutions and bureaus for research work are carried on through their aid. All of these activities are encouraged, because through them it is thought that a better and a healthier place to live in will result.

Is it not worth the attempt at least to point out to this class of men, who love to give generously where they can give wisely, the great value of our public water supplies and how with their help that value may be immensely enhanced to the great benefit of the community and to the everlasting credit of the benefactor? Entire water sheds at present populated and thus, potentially, a source of danger to the water supply, could be purchased, cleared of all human habitations and turned into splendid forest and park preserves, practically insuring the supply forever against the contamination we so much dread. Model shops and laboratories could be built, where equipment could be tested and further experiments made in purifying, softening and rendering commercially fit the many waters at present objectionable. With no fear of financial disasters threatening us—duplicate supply mains, pumps, filters and other appurtenances would be the invariable rule and the factor of safety to our municipalities become more nearly what it should be, rather than what it now so often is—negligible. But you will ask—are not these things to be obtained by taxation, just as are pavements, policemen and playgrounds? Yes, but only in part and often after

the demands of these and other more apparent and popular—but much less essential—things have received their quotas. The resultant budget is always a compromise between what is desired and proper, and what can be just gotten along with.

The great philanthropists of our cities recognize that a surgeon can not get the best results with an incomplete outfit of instruments, in a poorly equipped operating room. Why not treat us with the same thoughtfulness for we are also doing our part in saving and preserving life. Again, let us try and direct more general attention to the aims and capacity for doing good of this American Water Works Association.

“The advancement of knowledge in the construction and operation of water works” expresses very clearly our object and “the exchange of information and experience among its members” expresses vast possibilities.

Who can estimate the value of a great central reference bureau (which I suggest may be one of our great accomplishments), where the experiences and practices of all the water systems in the country would be catalogued and made easily accessible? Because of the great expense of collecting and tabulating such data, our efforts in this direction have been slight and our attainments meagre.

Our water works magazines and engineering journals have done at times very valuable work in collecting various water works statistics, and their labors along those lines deserve our warmest praise, but I feel that logically the process should be reversed and this Association should be in a position to furnish all such information to these journals when and as often as requested, rather than the other way around. This condition can not however be brought to pass with our present financial resources and methods, and for the same reasons the work of our many and important committees is hampered where it should be encouraged and unfettered. It is impractical to make our dues—even with a greatly increased membership—sufficiently large to properly finance all of these projects, but it may be possible to so present our case that certain enlightened municipalities and far sighted individuals, may see the wisdom of advancing funds to this Association for some of these purposes. We have done just this thing to a certain extent in electrolysis research work, and with the proper management it no doubt could be done again.

There are many other opportunities, besides those I have suggested, which lie ahead of us. We can not grasp them all perhaps, but we have the men and the ability and if with these we develop the inclination to accept even a few of these favorable chances for service, I believe our position among the great national societies will be safe and unchallenged.

In closing I must tell you that I have appreciated and enjoyed very greatly the honor of being the President of this Association and I could wish my successor nothing better than that you show to him the same courtesy, kindness and assistance that you have accorded me.